


5/21/2012

To  Representative Moss, Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee,
and all Representative Members of the House Appropriations Committee,

On behalf of the over 5,000 members of MEA/NEA Local 1 and the 6-E Coordinating Council, I oppose the passage of SB 1040.

The budget will soon be balanced again and the state is reporting a budget surplus in the hundreds of millions of dollars. However, rather than live up to its obligations and properly fund the constitutionally guaranteed pension system for educators, this legislative body is poised again to abrogate its responsibility by fundamentally slashing the benefits of current retirees, decimate the pensions of currently employed educators, and eliminate all hope of a good pension for future educators.

The Republican majority in this legislature has decided that public tax dollars which are slated to go to public schools and public schools employees are instead being routed in the form of multibillion dollar tax breaks to wealthy and powerful corporations. Now that there is a balanced budget with a budget surplus in the hundreds of millions of dollars, why is the Republican legislature still insisting on systematically defunding Michigan's public schools and the employees who work for Michigan's public schools?

This shift in taxpayer money to defund our public schools in order to pay for corporate tax breaks is also setting up our public school system to be taken over enmasse by for-profit charter and cyber schools. For example, the argument for wiping out our pensions is that "this keeps public school employees in line with the private sector." Charters don't have pensions. Forcing educators to pay more for health care was done because the Governor argued that it was a "Best Practice" as found in the private sector, such as charter schools. Privatizing services is also considered a "Best Practice" as found in charter schools. Senator Pavlov has already introduced the idea of privatizing teachers, which would be done when all public schools become privately owned charters. However, what's not argued is that in the "real world of the private sector" highly educated employees with college degrees (like educators) have pay, benefit, and pension packages that far exceed those found in our public schools and charter schools. And now, by passing this bill, our young people who were once thinking of entering the field of education have another reason to stay out.

Whether it's cutting over a billion in funding to public schools, forcing public school employees to pay substantially more for health costs, firing Michigan's public school employees through privatization, or wiping out educator's pensions, SB 1040 is just another bill in a long line of bills designed to shift Michigan tax dollars from Michigan's working people in order to fund huge tax breaks for corporations and corporate executives. We fundamentally disagree with the concept that the rights and privileges of wealthy and powerful corporations and their CEO's are more important than the rights of average Michigan citizens. We also fundamentally disagree that Michigan's public schools should continue to be defunded to force them into deficit so they can be taken over by for-profit charter and cyber schools.

By voting NO on SB1040, this legislative body will take a stand by living up to its constitutional obligations and by sending a message that our public schools and the people who work for them are not for sale to the highest bidder.

Sincerely,



John Duffy,

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